

**REMARKS**

A total of 23 claims remain in the present application. The foregoing amendments are presented in response to the Office Action mailed July 8, 2003, wherefore reconsideration of this application is requested.

By way of the above-noted amendments, original independent claim 1 has been amended to define that the method includes a step of obtaining, for each member of the team, dynamically maintained presence and availability information respecting each of a plurality of types of communications. These types of communications include at least one type of communications that utilizes resources of a Switched Telephone Network (STN), such as, for example, the well known Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). Original claim 7 has been amended to correct an error in claim dependency, and original claims 14 and 21 have been amended to more clearly define the claimed subject matter. New claims 22 and 23 have been introduced to define further features of the present invention, which are believed to be patentable.

In preparing the above-noted amendments, careful attention was paid to ensure that no new subject matter has been introduced.

Referring now to the text of the Office Action:

- a) claims 1-21 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b), as being unpatentable over the teaching of United States Patent No. 5,793,365 (Tang et al.).

The Examiner's rejection of claims 1-21 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b), is respectfully traversed in view of the following comments.

United States Patent No. 5,793,365 (Tang et al.) teaches a system and methods which provides each networked computer user with a user interface displaying visual representations of selected other computer users, generally of those workers in the user's workgroup, and further

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provides communication mechanisms enabling the user to contact any of the displayed workers. The user interface displays presence, availability and activity information for each person in the user's contact list. The activity information is primarily related to whether or not the user is currently using their PC, and thus can encompass participation in communications sessions that are mediated by their PC. However, Tang et al do not teach or suggest that the presence, availability and activity information displayed by the user interface include information pertaining to types of communication that are not mediated by their PC. In particular, Tang et al do not teach or suggest that the presence, availability and activity information obtained in respect of a team member also encompasses so-called voice telephone communications through the Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN).


In contrast, the present invention defines a method of initiating communications using a persistent virtual team environment instantiated by a collaboration services suite for facilitating collaboration between members of a geographically dispersed team. The method comprises obtaining, for each team member, dynamically maintained presence and availability information respecting a plurality of types of communications. Furthermore, amended claim 1 defines that "the types of communications sessions [includes] at least type of communications that utilizes resources of a Switched Telephone Network (PSTN)". Thus the present invention provides the team member with an enhanced awareness of activities within the team. In particular, the team member is made aware that a communication session is currently under way; who is currently participating in the communications session; and that the session is public, and can therefore be joined. The team member can use this information to decide whether to initiate a new communications session with a team mate or to join an already active communications session involving that team-mate. This functionality is provided across a wide variety of communications types, including communications sessions that engage resources of the PSTN, such as a conventional two-way telephone call. The cited prior art does not teach or suggest this feature, nor the advantages obtained thereby.

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In light of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that the presently claimed invention is clearly distinguishable over the teaching of the cited references, taken alone or in any combination. Thus it is believed that the present application is in condition for allowance, and early action in that respect is courteously solicited.

If any extension of time under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136 is required to obtain entry of this response, such extension is hereby respectfully requested. If there are any fees due under 37 C.F.R. §§ 1.16 or 1.17 which are not enclosed herewith, including any fees required for an extension of time under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136, please charge such fees to our Deposit Account No. 19-5113.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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